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RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0168
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2023
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3724
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0686
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1174
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3475
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1173
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO PRIORITY 0149
RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION PRIORITY 0647
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 0839
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0777
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0144
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 3040
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 001174

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2026
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: TAKING THE BAIT: CHAVEZ CREATES ANOTHER
INTERNATIONAL ROW

REF: LIMA 001681

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

1. (C) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez started a diplomatic row with the Peruvian Government after Peruvian presidential candidate Alan Garcia questioned Chavez' "Bolivarian" credentials in late April. Chavez called Garcia a corrupt thief on April 28, adding that Garcia and Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo were "two birds of a feather." Chavez vowed to cut off relations with Lima if Garcia were elected. On April 29, the Peruvian Government recalled its Ambassador to Venezuela. The Venezuelan Foreign Ministry responded in a communique that blamed the GOP for many of the GOV's own faults. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ali Rodriguez, however, told Venezuela's Ambassador to Peru to stay in Lima, according to press reports. On May 1, BRV Communications Minister William Lara labeled President Toledo an "office boy" and "talking puppet" of President Bush. As he has in other diplomatic incidents, Chavez is overreacting, claiming sovereignty violations, and blaming the United States. END SUMMARY.

Hitting Chavez Where It Hurts

2. (SBU) Left-wing Peruvian presidential candidate Alan Garcia called Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's withdrawal

from the Community of Andean Nations (CAN) "antibolivarian" on 21 April, according to pro-Chavez press reports. Garcia said Chavez' action represented the second time Venezuela had broken with Simon Bolivar's desire for Latin American unity. He compared Chavez with first Venezuelan President Jose Antonio Paez--also known as "the drunk"--who withdrew Venezuela from Gran Colombia. (Embassy Note: The fact that General Paez died in exile in New York may have made the comparison with Paez' later career more unbearable for Chavez.) On April 27, Garcia upped the ante. He contrasted Venezuela's sale of "all" (sic) its oil to the United States with Chavez' demands for Peru and Colombia to stop trade deals with the USG. "Don't be a scoundrel (sinvergüenza)," Garcia lectured Chavez.

13. (SBU) Chavez walked right into Garcia's clever trap, responding with an extended rant against Garcia on April 28 during a ceremony commemorating workers at a major Caracas theater. He called Garcia a corrupt thief. He said that if "by the work of the devil" Alan Garcia became president, he would withdraw his ambassador. "With a president like that, Venezuelan is not going to have relations with Peru," he vowed. Chavez noted the following day in Cuba that Garcia and Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo were "two of a kind." He said that since Lourdes Flores, the Peruvian presidential "candidate of the empire" did not win, "surely (the U.S. empire) read to him from the imperial book and said, the first thing you do is attack Chavez, (Bolivian President) Evo (Morales), and (Cuban leader) Fidel (Castro)."

Venezuelan MFA Response: I Know You Are But What Am I?

14. (C) The Peruvian Government responded the same day
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(April 29) by withdrawing its Ambassador to Venezuela for Chavez' "persistent and flagrant meddling" in Peru's internal politics, according to press reports. (Note: This is the second time this year that Toledo has withdrawn his Ambassador. In January 2006, Toledo recalled his man in Caracas in response to Chavez' publicly praising candidate Ollanta Humala during Humala's trip to Venezuela.) Couching its response in terms of the principle of "non-intervention," the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry issued a communique faulting the GOP for committing many of the BRV's own dirty tricks. For example, the Venezuelan communique denounced "rude aggressions against Venezuela." It complained that Garcia was "determined to pull Venezuela into (Peru's) internal conflicts." Candidate Garcia had called President Chavez ugly names, the note continued, and Venezuela was not going to sit idly by and take it. In contrast to his ministry's defiant communique, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Ali Rodriguez, just back from months of convalescence in Cuba, said he told Venezuela's Ambassador to Peru to stay put and not "fall into provocation," according to press reports. Rodriguez claimed the crisis with Peru was an international campaign to destabilize Venezuela.

15. (SBU) The name-calling continued May 1, by which date the Chavez administration had shifted most of its rhetoric onto the outgoing Peruvian President. Keeping on the message of Chavez' ties to the United States, Garcia said Chavez had a "double standard." "Who does (Chavez) think he is? A Saddam Hussein who can lord it over other countries because he has oil?" asked Garcia. Garcia announced he would send Chavez a Peruvian guide to manners if he became president. Venezuelan Communications and Information Minister William Lara shot back called President Toledo the "office boy" and "talking puppet" of President Bush.

Chavez Upsets Kirchner and Lula

¶6. (U) Separately, Argentine daily La Nacion reported that Argentine President Nestor Kirchner and Brazilian President Lula da Silva "reproached" Chavez April 27 for having participated the previous week in an energy summit in Asuncion that allegedly questioned Brasilia and Buenos Aires's will to help develop other Mercosur states. Chavez apparently had suggested that the disintegration of Mercosur would not bother him. Citing Brazilian and Argentine government sources, the article said Kirchner and da Silva told Chavez they wanted him to moderate his participation in Southern Cone issues. President da Silva told Chavez to stop encouraging Bolivian President Morales' aggressive stance toward Brazilian state-oil company Petrobras.

Comment

¶7. (C) Chavez' diplomatic incidents are becoming increasingly predictable. It would seem the Venezuelan Government were reading from a playbook used for every international dispute, no matter how poorly adaptable: (1) react to criticism "asymmetrically," that is, fight flies with a flame-thrower; (2) claim interference in internal Venezuelan affairs; (3) blame the United States for starting the whole thing in the first place. The BRV decision not to recall its Ambassador is not a sign of rapprochement. More likely, the BRV wants its Ambassador to remain in Lima to continue trying to get Humala elected. Chavez appears most

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sensitive to attacks from the left that question his fundamental assumed role as the world's premier warrior against the U.S. "menace." His personality is brittle enough that he could not abide being labeled a bad copy of Bolivar, his idol. We could not have scripted Alan Garcia's remarks any better.

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